

IMSA Media Conference

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Daytona, Florida, USA

Connor Zilisch

Ryan Dalziel

Dwight Merriman

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We have LMP2 winners here at the Mobil 1 Twelve Hours of Sebring presented by Cadillac. We'll have Connor Zilisch, Ryan Dalziel, Dwight Merriman. This is obviously back-to-back wins for the team. They won the season opening Rolex 24 at Daytona.

Connor, talk about getting the call to close it out here and what you had to do to bring it home again.

CONNOR ZILISCH: Yeah, it's an honor for the team to trust me, give me the chance to go out there and show them what I have at the end. Scott was on it with the strategy calls all day. It was really tough to pass out there. It was kind of just whoever could get track position, get to the lead, was going to end up winning.

There about an hour to go, we were all running in a train. I think I was seventh. I knew I wasn't going to pass them, so I just started saving fuel, was going to wait for the last pit stop. I saved enough to get back. I took the lead when I came back out.

Pretty unreal to get two wins in my first two WeatherTech starts. I'd be curious to know if anyone else has ever done that. Anyway, just super thankful that they gave me an opportunity to come here and do this. It's been a dream come true. I've definitely had worse days in my life.

THE MODERATOR: Ryan, again, back-to-back wins, huge start to the season. You got points in both of those. You're atop the points standings. Not only two huge wins, but a points lead. What does all that mean?

RYAN DALZIEL: Yeah, I mean, it was a weird day. Feel like every time we kind of got to the front, we ended up in the back. I think when I got in the car, the plan was double me, double Connor at the end. I got in the car, we were in the lead. I think one of the GTPs went off and threw out some carbon, and in the space of one lap, we got overheating, then we got a puncture.

That's when we pitted off sequence. I think it was only four or five laps after the restart. I want to say I thought that was it. Without a yellow, I knew we were going to be struggling to make time back.

We still had the pace in the car. We definitely didn't give up. We knew once the yellow came out, we did the driver change. We were already a little bit offset with the fuel time.

Connor, like he said, he kind of just started saving a little bit of fuel. There was a whole conversation for a few minutes on the intercom, which is this call is going to be the hero or zero call for the team (laughter).

We knew we had the potential of getting to the lead based on the fuel time. How many times in racing do these things work out perfectly? Once we got this the lead, you look at the list of drivers that are behind Connor on that restart. The talent and the guys with experience. Kid just kept his head cool and brought it home.

Just a good day for Dwight and I. Looking forward to the next one.

THE MODERATOR: Dwight, another crown jewel victory here to go with the Rolex wins. Now you got a Sebring win. How bringing is that for your racing résumé?

DWIGHT MERRIMAN: I'm super happy because every time I've been here before, we podiumed but never won. First time I was really excited. The third time it was like, Am I ever going to win this race or not?

The team did a great job, including these guys. Also, as they mentioned, engineering, the whole crew. These off sequence stops, the one that was off sequence by strategy, they were fast. Mistakes were not made. The prep on the car, the car was fast. The development of the car. These guys, the other Ryan in engineering, the crew. The car was good.

You saw some cars going off today. A lot of times it's too low or something. The long run pace was good, right? It was working both daytime and nighttime.

I'm super happy. It's definitely so much a team sport.



Yeah, I drive first, so I'm trying to hand it to them without damage. If there's a hole in the floor, it's not as fast in the last hour. You're in trouble. These things are on my mind, so...

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. Connor, I think you got in the car with an hour and a half left in the race. I think there was a yellow around 45 minutes or so. Pretty much everybody came in for a pit stop. I think you came out fourth. You managed to get to first by the time the next yellow came out. How did you do it?

CONNOR ZILISCH: Yeah, I was in seventh, we were coming to the green on the restart about 45 minutes to go. I was the fourth car to come out of the seven in line. Thankfully I'd been saving enough fuel, when I came out, we were leading those four cars that came in. We jumped those three guys.

I didn't pass anybody on track at all the last hour and a half. I passed one car, but then he passed my right back. Honestly, I did no passing. It was all strategy.

I literally said on the radio when that second caution came out with 30 minutes to go or whatever, There is literally zero chance we're in the lead right now.

They're like, no, you're the leader.

I was like, You've got to be shitting me. There is no way (laughter).

It was honestly unbelievable. It takes a team effort. Ryan and Dwight did a great job. We kept the car clean all day. I had a code brown out of turn one. It's never good when you're looking at a guy going backwards at 130 miles an hour. Thankfully I kept it all clean. It was a wild race.

Like Ryan said, we went to the back, came back to the front more than once or twice. Total team effort. Just so proud to be a part of this team.

Q. Were there any fuel concerns in the last 30 minutes?

CONNOR ZILISCH: No, none at all. Once that caution came out, we knew we were good.

DWIGHT MERRIMAN: The big decision was the stop. I think at that particular point, it was a short yellow, so it's more of a decision.

CONNOR ZILISCH: We had to pit.

DWIGHT MERRIMAN: We were coming in, we were quite far back, but we have a little more fuel than everybody else. Of the cars that came in, we could beat them. It turned out that we're thinking, like, should we do this or not. Most of the cars came in who weren't the leaders.

CONNOR ZILISCH: It was going to be tight.

DWIGHT MERRIMAN: We were up on fuel because of this other incident. He was the first one out of the pits of that group.

Q. Ryan, you've talked about what this race means to you. The family connection to Sebring. Now you've won this back to back with Daytona. What does it mean?

RYAN DALZIEL: My wife is going to be really upset because I sent her home halfway through the race. She hasn't been at race since preCOVID. She wanted to come here. After Daytona, we did so well. Got to the point where I've done this so many years, no family here. Stresses me out too much to figure out if they've got food or are in air-conditioning. I sent her and my friends home early. They watched the rest from home.

A lot of support I get down here. My wife and all her extended family are from here. Many of her family are still here. Many of them were here watching the race. I have posters from her late father from the very first one he went to. He had every poster that he kind of left for me after he passed away.

It's a special. They both are for me for different reasons. But I think at the same time I don't think of them as home races. I just think of them as the races that you want to win. This one's been a tough one for us, for me as well. Daytona, we've had a lot of success. Here there's been a lot of, like, what could have been, no more so than Watkins Six Hour. That's my freaking nemesis. Now I have to go tick that one off now.

Q. Connor, fuel saving. Not doing a lot of that in sprint races. Where did you learn how to do that?

CONNOR ZILISCH: Simulator. I've done a good bit of it in simulators. I obviously do a lot of the Trackhouse Racing simulator, for their Cup series team.

It's still the same concept. I've done a lot of it there. A lot of it's just learning from these guys, right? We have a mode on our steering wheel that kind of teaches us. I've used that throughout the weekend to kind of learn it.

Yeah, I mean, it's been, like I said, my second WeatherTech race. A lot of the stuff is still really new to me. Just been trying to figure out all the ebbs and flows of how these races go. Every time a caution comes out, I honestly have no idea where I need to be, where I need to go when they tell me to wave around. Every race I'm going to get more comfortable and hopefully will continue to get better and continue to have success.

Q. Connor, you obviously have been a revelation in prototypes. Your stockcar racing is continuing to grow. Is it easy to manage all this coming in as quickly as it has?

CONNOR ZILISCH: No, it's definitely not easy to manage. It takes a lot of work and a lot of people. The people that I have behind me supporting me behind the scenes is what makes me successful, what allows me to go out there and do my job without having to worrying about outside factors.

To answer your question, no, it's far from easy. Every day I'm always racing, right? I'm still a senior in high school. I still got to worry about some schoolwork here and there. I do school online, three hours a week. I say that because it sounds cool (laughter).

It's not easy at all. Bouncing back and forth from car to car every weekend, the stockcar that can't go 30 miles an hour through a corner, to a prototype that goes 130 miles an hour for a corner. It's all different.

It all challenges me and makes me a better driver.

THE MODERATOR: Guys, congratulations.

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